AL.2.2002-260
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1999 Minister's Forum on Learning

Learning for Life

What we heard

March 2000

Alberta
LEARNING

Alberta Learning Cataloguing in Publication Data

Alberta. Alberta Learning.
Minister's Forum on Learning, Learning for Life: What we heard--.

"March 2000"
ISBN 0-7785-1055-7

1. Alberta. Minister's Forum on Learning (1999: Edmonton, AB).
2. Education -- Alberta.
3. Education -- Alberta -- Aims and objectives.
4. Continuing education -- Alberta.
5. Adult learning -- Alberta.
6. Adult Education -- Alberta. I. Title. II. Title: 1999 Minister's Forum on Learning, Learning For Life: What we heard--. III. Alberta. Minister's Forum on Learning.

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What we heard

Minister's Message

As we move into the next century, people's knowledge and ability to acquire the skills they need will play a significant role in our quality of life and economic prosperity. With the 1999 Minister's Forum, we looked to our partners to share their ideas and experiences on how to give Albertans the tools they need for the future. This input will be valuable for Alberta Learning's future business planning processes and other consultations underway like Wayne Cao's MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning.

The feedback we received gave us excellent information on what it takes to ensure our learning system remains fresh and keeps pace with our constantly changing world. From the keynote speakers to the small groups, the discussions were lively and thought provoking and I'd like to highlight the flavour of what was said. There was a real recognition that the world is changing and that we need to continually adapt. To accomplish this, collaboration rated as a high priority. And over and over, participants talked about the need to create an appreciation for learning, supported by a learning community. We heard important themes like the need for us to work toward a flexible learning system that supports seamless and quality learning experiences - removing barriers and thinking creatively about how best to support the individual and their unique learning needs. These highlights are just a taste of the rich mix of insights that participants contributed. This report captures more completely the variety of responses, as well as the common themes that emerged.

I thank the participants for sharing their dreams and hopes, as well as their thoughts on the best way to address issues. This collaborative approach will truly help to build on the strengths of our learning system and further ensure that lifelong learning is a reality for our province.

Dr. Lyle Oberg
Minister of Learning

Executive Summary

The 1999 Minister's Forum on Learning took place on November 19 and 20. About 200 Albertans - students, parents, Aboriginal leaders, educators from schools and post-secondary institutions and people from business, labour, municipalities and government - gathered from around the province to provide input on how to foster lifelong learning beyond traditional boundaries. Under the Forum's theme *Learning for Life*, the participants addressed three key topics:

- A vision for lifelong learning in Alberta:

  participants identified the meaning of lifelong learning, its future look and underlying values and principles.

- Priorities for the future:

  participants identified key actions for achieving a lifelong learning vision, circumstances that affect individual learning and community action and ways to enhance these positive circumstances and reduce the negative ones.

- Fostering a lifelong learning culture:

  participants identified key players and their roles for creating this culture and opportunities for partnership.

Beginning with Day One, this report provides a chronological overview of the forum's activities: it summarizes the presentations of the keynote speakers, the discussion that occurred among the panelists and the responses made by participants to each of the three topics during the small group discussions. The report recaps the topic descriptions and corresponding questions provided to participants. Both the general comments of participants and the specific points listed by the small groups on the flip charts are also captured. Each list that was taken from the flip charts is marked in italics.

Day One

Keynote Speaker

To begin the Forum, Dr. Donald Norris, an internationally known strategic planner in higher education, delivered a keynote addressed entitled "Transforming Learning in the Knowledge Age" to set the stage for small group discussion on the first topic, namely A Vision for Lifelong Learning in the 21st Century.

Dr. Norris spoke of three imperatives:

a) we must leave behind yesterday's thinking about learning and life

b) that a new knowledge and learning industry is emerging, and

c) that tomorrow's organizations will need to transform to serve the needs of learning and life.

Dr. Norris gave participants a glimpse of what learning will look like in the 21st Century. He spoke of a fundamental shift that has taken place from the Industrial Age to the Information or Knowledge Age and predicted that the knowledge learning industry would be a major driver of growth in the 21st Century. His view was that the knowledge learning industry would become a source of sustainable, competitive advantage because of the advances in Information and Communications Technology and the digitization, deregulation and globalization taking place.

Knowledge Age learners, Dr. Norris stated, would learn every day and physical learning space would be everywhere: including desktops and laptops, classrooms and boardrooms, malls, union halls and community learning centers.

Dr. Norris offered six objectives to describe Knowledge Age Learning:

- perpetual
- distributed
- interactive
- collaborative
- inclusive
- personalized

He spoke to the need for a transformation to a learning centered model where teachers would act in the roles of coach, mentor, facilitator or cyber-guide and where students would choose when, where and how they should learn. Technology, Dr. Norris stated, would enable a "fusion" of activities in our daily life such as work, learning, recreation, commerce, and spirituality.

Strategic alliances were essential in Dr. Norris's view. He saw the need to build upon "communities of practice" - communities of trades, crafts, professions, vocations and philanthropies to show the way.

Dr. Norris suggested that to meet the needs of perpetual learners, every organization would have to change its approach to learning or risk being marginalized.

TOPIC 1:

A Vision for Lifelong Learning in Alberta

Albertans recognize that learning is an investment in the future - critical to both personal well being and to prosperity. Given the extent of constant economic and social change, the need for continual learning is rising. Lifelong learning occurs everywhere: in formal and informal settings and through life experiences and social interaction. The challenge we face in becoming a learning society is ensuring that all citizens are equipped with the knowledge, skills and qualifications they will need in the future.

In this session, participants described their vision for lifelong learning against the backbone of three questions.

1 What does lifelong learning mean to you?

Forum participants saw lifelong learning in many different ways. Many had a visual picture - for example, an elderly person walking across the stage to receive a degree, while others saw lifelong learning as a process that continues from birth to death.

Many participants viewed lifelong learning in a positive manner. Some saw lifelong learning as necessary to help individuals reach their maximum potential. Others saw lifelong learning more as an attitude needed for survival in an evolving knowledge-based society. Some of the terms used to describe lifelong learning included: dynamic, inclusive, interactive, continuous personal achievement, developing potential, overcoming barriers, perpetual, collaborative. Lifelong learning, it was said, is ongoing intellectual fitness.

A number of participants also raised questions or concerns about lifelong learning. Some were concerned about the drive for technology and the material nature of society. Some participants felt that the goals of lifelong learning needed to be broader than allowing individuals a better income and quality of life. Lifelong learning, it was stated, is also needed to create better citizens, active and concerned about the community as a whole. Meeting the basic needs of those individuals in poverty and others who face barriers to their ability to learn were cited as a concern. Some of the issues that participants suggested would need to be addressed included

certification through distance learning, accessibility which involves bringing lifelong learning to everyone - including those without higher levels of education - and teaching people how to manage their learning by discerning the difference between learning and education. Improving accessibility also involves addressing isolation due to technology and establishing values.

The major differences that participants perceived between lifelong learning and traditional education were that:

- Learning and the assessment and recognition of such learning can take place outside of an institutional setting.
- Lifelong learning is more individually focused and learner-centered. It allows for individuality over conformity.
- Lifelong learning is more voluntary, self-directed and motivated.
- Lifelong learning is more empowering.
- Lifelong learning takes people outside a certain comfort zone.

2 What will lifelong learning look like for Albertans in the year 2005?

Participants had varied viewpoints on what lifelong learning in Alberta would look like in 5 years. They recognized the importance of learning as an investment in the future and critical to both personal well being and to prosperity. It was also recognized that the opportunities afforded by new information technology and the need Alberta will have to diversify its economy and to base future competitiveness on knowledge intensive industries and services mean that people will have both the need and opportunity to go on learning throughout their lifetimes.

Generally, participants suggested that the future was bright and that Alberta's system of lifelong learning in the year 2005 would be more seamless, partner oriented, more universally accessible and learner-focused. Participants cited the importance of establishing basic values as a foundation for lifelong learning in Alberta. The most important of these values (to be addressed in question 3), according to most participants, is equity of access.

Key to achieving this vision, participants cited:

- The importance of maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching, curriculum and other learning resources.
- Adequate government resources and the continued development and nurturing of partnerships, including all education stakeholders, including learners, learning providers, business, community and government. Collectively, these partnerships are important for breaking down the barriers that prevent individuals from accessing learning opportunities successfully.
- Support for basic education and the recognition that the first five years are critical to a child's future education and success.

Participant responses to the look of lifelong learning in 2005 generally fell into one of the following categories:

- Government Role and Resources - How should Alberta Learning support lifelong learning?
- Individual Responsibility - What is the role of individuals in lifelong learning?
- Learning Providers/Partners - Who will be delivering lifelong learning in 2005?
- Access - Increasing learner pathways.
- Learning Delivery - How will learning be delivered in 2005?
- Measuring Success - What should we be measuring?
- Global Outlook

Government Role/Resources

Some participants stated the Government of Alberta needs to provide additional financial resources to support lifelong learning, viewing education as an investment rather than a cost. It was suggested that government's role is that of an enabler with an emphasis on:

- *facilitating an increased focus on the needs of learners;*
- *breaking down barriers limiting participation;*
- *reducing the gap between haves and have nots;*
- *ensuring affordability across socio-economic groups;*
- *supporting family literacy; and*
- *providing "just in time" learning opportunities - that is, tailored learning that responds to an immediate need.*

Individual/Community Responsibility

Participants felt a need to balance individual needs with the well-being of society. It was noted that learning begins and continues within the context of family. Lifelong learning, it was said, requires a foundation of healthy individuals and communities where:

- *lifelong learning begins with pre-natal wellness;*
- *learning skills and attitudes are instilled early and for all;*
- *the message that learning leads to good/responsible citizenship is reinforced;*
- *social and interpersonal skills, leadership and conflict resolution are stressed as important;*
- *individuals are provided with the tools they require to make informed choices.*

The importance of relationship-based learning was also noted and it was suggested that technology is not a replacement for human interaction. Rather, technology should facilitate greater opportunities for networking.

Participants said that lifelong learning was about making personal choices. In the future, individuals will face greater learning program choices, portability (based on recognition of prior learning credit) and more flexibility of time and place to learn. Individuals would be empowered and responsible for developing their own learning plans. Participants suggested that such learning plans should be based on a realistic view of supply and demand - not all high school students are university-bound. Apprenticeship and other vocational learning opportunities represent solid alternative career paths.

Learning Providers and Partners

Participants stated that collaborative efforts between learning providers and other education stakeholders will be required to equip all Albertans with the knowledge, skills and qualifications they will need for their futures. By the year 2005, participants envisioned the following types of partnering relationships among learning providers:

- *Greater connectivity between secondary and post secondary education.*
- *Increased portability of credits between post-secondary institutions.*
- *Many inter-sectoral partnerships focusing on meeting the needs of the individual - for example, between business, health, social services and education community.*
- *Multiple providers outside of traditional institutions, including corporate colleges*
- *More choices available in careers and education.*
- *More flexible scheduling for the life situation of the learner.*

- *Expansion of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' graduate and post-baccalaureate programs.*
- *Community centers should become campuses.*
- *Continuous learning societies will emerge.*
- *Local and global affiliations.*
- *Greater industry involvement in learning.*
- *Collaboration should win out over competitiveness.*
- *Improved co-operative programs.*

In addition to the programs offered by publicly funded learning providers, participants envisioned an increased number of learning opportunities provided by government, private education providers, business organizations, professional organizations and interest groups.

Accessibility

Participants viewed increasing access and equitable access as important priorities for Alberta Learning towards the year 2005. Participants suggested that accessibility may include:

- *Multiple access points;*
- *Equality of access to learning (time, place, cost, type of program) and resources;*
- *Elimination of financial, racial, gender or cultural barriers to education;*
- *More opportunities for more people (kids, youth, adults, seniors);*
- *Better recognition of qualifications and prior learning of people;*
- *More choices among educational offerings from around the world;*
- *Greater flexibility in high school programs to accommodate student needs - for example, programs to reduce the number of dropouts, or combined work/learn programs; and*
- *Opportunities for virtual learning (for example, teleconferencing, meeting student needs in rural Alberta).*

Participants suggested that it is important to deal with disparity between haves and have-nots through greater community awareness, intervention and information.

Learning Delivery

Participants foresaw significant change in the way learning would be delivered by 2005. Some of the suggested changes include:

- *Interactive multi-media and on-line learning resources accessible anywhere, anytime.*
- *Less bricks and mortar; use of distributed learning.*
- *Increased number and diversity of learning locations (for example, libraries, internet kiosks and schools made available as adult community learning centers).*

- *Increased number of players involved in delivery.*
- *All citizens on line.*
- *Distributed learning resource experts.*
- *Better allowances for differences in learning styles (for example, visual, auditory and hands-on).*
- *Laptops available for all students and teachers.*
- *Menu of options at all stages.*
- *Loss of concrete boundaries - work, school, home and family time would more integrated.*
- *Teacher roles to change to coaching, allowing students to become the decision-makers, especially as they get older.*
- *More blended methods of instruction.*
- *More involvement by older people with children and young adults as role models and mentors.*
- *Shift to community-centered, multi-purpose facilities.*
- *Greater networking among educational groups and institutions.*
- *People of all ages and interests will be accessing learning from home via the computer.*
- *Learning will be increasingly a part of working and leisure.*

Participants felt that appropriate mediums for learning would meet diverse needs and seek a balance between traditional and virtual classrooms. Participants cautioned that a backlash against highly technologically based learning could evolve. The most prized learning, participants noted, would involve human contact.

Measuring Success

Participants stated that Alberta Learning's ability to identify benchmarks and monitor outcomes will become more challenging, given the global transformation occurring in learning. Some of the thoughts for 2005 that participants suggested include:

- *Measuring the quality of teaching, curriculum and the lifelong learning opportunities made available (program, time, place and mode of delivery) will be an increasing priority for government*
- *The value and necessity of teaching professionals will rise.*
- *More competency-based measurements and less emphasis on formal credentials (for example, greater emphasis on learning portfolios).*
- *More measures and standards to assess prior learning experiences.*
- *Standards and outputs that are not dictated by time.*
- *More skill certification handled by industry (for example, Microsoft).*

- *More emphasis on "back to the basics" learning.*
- *More learning opportunities of questionable quality will arise, due to more unstructured and unregulated interconnections.*
- *Specific measures and standards for assessing computer or virtual learning may be needed with the rise of credit and non-credit programs on the Internet.*
- *More self-assessment tools.*
- *More assessment carried out by the professional community or coaches.*

Global Outlook

Some participants stressed the importance of receiving national and international recognition for Alberta's system of lifelong learning by the year 2005. A number of participants suggested that Alberta Learning will need a more global outlook. They suggested that a global learning community will emerge that is accessible to all learners, leading to a fusion of provincial and national boundaries in the area of education. Participants envisioned:

- *Global competition for skills and services (content, clientele, suppliers).*
- *The need to establish better ways for comparing Alberta's learning system with other learning systems around the world.*
- *More self-employed, home-based entrepreneurs.*
- *A draw upon the best local, national and international resources.*

3 What are the underlying values and principles that support a lifelong learning vision for Albertans?

Through the small group discussions, a number of values/principles emerged.

Principles

Participants suggested that the education of Albertans is key not only to employment and economic growth, but also to the reduction of social and regional inequality. Committing to a greater investment in learners must be underpinned by three principles:

- All Albertans deserve access to learning opportunities, not just those who are intellectually gifted or economically privileged. Special attention should be given to the needs of the disadvantaged and illiterate.
- Albertans need encouragement and opportunity to learn throughout their lives, not just during the years of compulsory schooling.

- Alberta recognizes the transformation in learning that is taking place and the need to develop comprehensive, modern and efficient education systems.

Values

A number of values to guide the direction of lifelong learning were suggested by participants. These values are:

- *Appreciation for learning:*
  Learning is central to all activities whether at school, work, home or play. All forms of learning within Alberta society should be encouraged, shared, and recognized.

- *Learning and Citizenship:*
  Learning builds upon our humanity and responsibilities towards one another. Lifelong learning develops within citizens the ability to think critically, morally, and ethically and to participate in society in a responsible and meaningful way.

- *Equity and Access:*
  Learning opportunities are available and delivered in a fair and equitable manner to all Albertans, regardless of gender, age, beliefs, disability, ancestry, place of origin, financial circumstances or current geographic location.

- *Learning is Inclusive:*
  Learning cannot focus solely on Alberta's youth. Older Albertans have much to contribute both as learners, mentors and role models. Learning for life must be all encompassing and include academics, arts, culture, and physical development.

- *Quality:*
  Excellence, innovation and continuous improvement are integral aspects of all curriculum, program, planning, delivery and service areas.

- *Learner-Centered:*
  Programs, courses and services of the system are focused on meeting the learning and developmental needs of the learners it serves. Holistic models should be used to meet needs.

- *Relevance:*
  Programs, courses and services of the system are relevant to the needs and interests of individual learners as well as to the cultural, social and economic needs of different segments of society.

- *Responsiveness:*
  Programs, courses and services of the system are able to respond quickly and appropriately to the changing learning needs of individuals and society.

- *Respect and Trust:*
  Mutual respect and trust are the cornerstones of all activities, and the partners involved in the management and delivery of education (for example, administration, faculty, and staff) must be committed to creating the best possible learning system.

- *Partnerships:*
  The best learning system results from planning together in equal partnerships with all who hold an interest in education. There should exist among partners a collective commitment to the value of lifelong learning.

- *Public Education:*
  A dynamic, publicly funded, accountable and well-governed public education system is essential.

- *Innovation:*
  New ideas and new ways of providing learning to build on the successes of the current system are required in order to provide even more flexible and creative responses to the province's economic and social challenges.

- *Fiscal Responsibility & Affordability:*
  The system must be affordable to individual learners and to society as a whole, provide excellent value for the money invested and able to demonstrate and communicate its successes.

- *Universal Foundation:*
  Basic needs (health, housing, social support) must be met to allow learning. Enhanced community commitment to learning is required through parents, teachers, workplaces, community organizations. Parents should have access to the necessary supports and resources to ensure that children are ready to learn when they enter the system.

- *Basic Education and Literacy as a Priority:*
  All Albertans are entitled to basic education. Breaking the cycle of illiteracy should be a priority of government.

- *Learning and Technology:*
  Technology cannot replace human interaction in the learning process. Learning technologies should build upon existing human support networks.

Day Two

Panel Discussion

As a lead in to the morning sessions, a panel of learners representing the universities, colleges and technical institutes, apprenticeship, and secondary sectors outlined their vision for lifelong learning in Alberta and the important factors that influence learning outcomes.

Panelists included:

- Lewis Cardinal - doctoral student and President of Native Student Services, University of Alberta
- Leslie Church - masters student and Vice President, Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS)
- James Grant - apprentice partsman, Canmore
- Jennifer Stang - high school student, Centre High, Edmonton

All panelists spoke of the factors that enabled them to be successful in the attainment of their learning objectives. All spoke of the importance of interaction, personalized support (family, teacher or peer) and a sense of community. The panelists also noted that learning did not take place solely in the classroom and that programs that provide work experience components, such as the Registered Apprenticeship Program, should be supported.

While issues such as affordability of education, up-to-date curriculum, the importance of quality teachers, information about choices were raised, the panelists indicated that they looked forward to the journey in life that awaited them.

It was agreed by many associated with the Forum that the panelist discussion was a highlight of the two-day event. Participants came away from the discussions with a sense that the future prosperity of the province was secure if the panelists were at all indicative of other learners within the learning system.

TOPIC 2:

Priorities for the Future

The future priorities and direction of education are of interest to all learning stakeholders. We have a good educational system in Alberta, but it is important to continue building on that foundation. Through partnerships with all stakeholders, lifelong learning can become a reality and source of growth. Learning is not done in isolation and developing a lifelong learning system requires participation by all members of the community.

There are several consultations addressing the issue of lifelong learning that will help shape priorities for the future. The MLA Committee on Lifelong Learning will be conducting a broad consultation over the months following this Forum. The Children's Forum held on October 5th and 6th made recommendations that impact lifelong learning. Alberta Learning is consulting with stakeholders, staff and other government departments to guide the development of the Ministry's business plan.

In this session, participants identified future priorities, building on the input from previous consultations, the panel discussion, key strategies from the Alberta Learning business plan and their own cross-sector knowledge, expertise and perspective.

1 What key actions are needed to move towards a vision for lifelong learning?

Participants identified a number of key actions needed to fulfill a vision for lifelong learning in Alberta. It was suggested that all learning stakeholders start with an absolute commitment to educating children well and valuing all children equally. Participants stated that lifelong learning requires a foundation of healthy individuals and communities and that all Albertans share in the responsibility for providing the right environment to nurture a learning culture. Participants stressed the importance of developing learning communities - a coming together of schools, colleges, universities, business and industry, professional organizations, non-profit agencies and government in a variety of ways to meet the needs of learners and society as a whole.

Many of the suggested key actions were system-wide in focus and directed at government and learning providers in terms of funding and changes to bureaucratic existing structures. Leadership, participants stated, is needed both at the government and school/institution level.

System funding

Participants suggested that education should be viewed as an investment, not as expenditure. Some participants advocated changes in the way resources should be allocated - for example, funding to follow the student. A number of participants advocated increased funding in the following areas:

- *Financial support for learners.*
- *Technology - increasing technological access for all students and the availability of learning technologies for learning providers.*
- *Operational support for school jurisdictions and institutions to recruit quality teachers and professors, reduce teacher/student ratios, and allow for more individualized support.*
- *Support for parents of learners - tax deductions, child support, etc.*
- *Early childhood development - an emphasis on the years 0-5.*

Changes to bureaucratic structures

Participants stated that implementation of a vision for lifelong learning would require a fundamental shift in the supporting structures of government and of institutions. Some participants suggested that a transition from a hierarchical structure to a holistic structure is needed - where cross-government, industry, institution and community learning initiatives could be supported through pooled/decentralized funding.

Some participants suggested that government needs to move away from control or micro-management of the learning system and increase the level of community control and involvement in learning. The department, participants said, should articulate principles for the system and increase incentives.

Participants in many of the small group discussions identified the need for government and institutions to create structures that will allow for the recognition of prior learning and facilitate the ease of transfer:

- between high school and post-secondary institutions
- between colleges, universities and technical institutes
- between workplaces and post-secondary institutions

Providing portable learning and seamless service were noted as high priorities and linked to the continued development of diverse delivery systems (learning that is available anytime, any place, anywhere). Participants suggested that assessing the learning opportunities provided through alternative delivery mechanisms would be both a challenge and a priority. Participants advocated explicit learning outcomes, identifying critical competencies and adopting standards so that learning can be assessed, recognized and portable across employers, industry groups, provincial and national boundaries.

Participants also stressed that recognizing prior learning be as encompassing as possible to include a recognition and value placed on all learning - life experiences, work experiences, formal or non-formal learning. The emphasis, participants stated, should be on demonstrated competencies. For example, apprentices who enter university should benefit from receiving advance credits for previous experiences.

Other Specific Actions

ECS to grade 12

- *Support to teachers - for example, learning resources, smaller class sizes, computer literacy courses.*
- *Support for learners - more counseling and information on choices.*
- *Increased use of mentors.*
- *Promote cultural diversity and awareness.*
- *Increase technological support.*
- *Create flexible work/learning programs for high school students.*
- *Provide extra resources to support the learning of higher-needs students.*
- *Focus education on how to learn and interact and not on content alone.*
- *Review curriculum continually for relevance.*
- *Provide paid professional development for teachers for two weeks outside of the current instructional year.*
- *Develop information centers where students can explore choices, create mobile learning resources.*

Post-secondary

- *Change accreditation policies to allow private, competitive, degree-granting, niche-focused institutions to flourish.*
- *Broaden the criteria by which the Students Finance Board determines the student eligibility for support. Allow more part-time learning and alternative learning programs to be eligible for support.*
- *Increase the level of interaction and collaboration between high school and post-secondary institutions.*
- *Encourage universities to be more learner-centered.*
- *Create more student internship/work experience opportunities.*
- *Increase the number of spaces in institutions.*
- *Increase investment in research.*
- *Share intellectual property.*
- *Reduce tuition levels.*
- *Direct more emphasis/funding toward masters and doctoral programs.*

Community

- *Foster public respect for educators and education.*
- *Create more opportunities for individuals to access learning opportunities outside of the institutional setting - for example, storefronts, kiosks in malls, libraries, community-based learning centers, etc.*
- *Replicate the ParticipACTION social marketing campaign for lifelong learning.*
- *Provide greater community access to information and advisory services.*

Finally, participants noted the importance of human interaction in the learning process. Technology should be used only as a tool to enhance interaction and not to replace it.

2 What circumstances (positively or negatively) affect a person's ability to learn and a community's ability to take action?

Participants identified a number of circumstances that affect a person's ability to learn and the community's ability to take action. The critical areas that participants identified as positively or negatively impacting an individual's ability to learn include:

- *Family Values - education, lifestyle, motivation, early childhood development, family time constraints, expectations and diets for children.*
- *Personal Characteristics - age, gender, language.*
- *Personal Values - work ethic, cultural and spiritual background, attitudes and aptitudes, past experiences, drive, passion, desire to learn, emotional and physical health.*
- *Socio-Economic Status - parental income, parent's educational background.*
- *Personal Support Mechanisms - role models, mentors, personal attention, parents, friends.*
- *Access - to information, technology, program options, learning resources, funding (loans and grants).*
- *Financing - adequacy of financial resources for learners, increasing cost of learning opportunities.*
- *Community - geographic location, dynamics of a community, corporate citizenship, level of partnering in community.*
- *Instruction - quality teaching, spectrum of instruction, caring teachers, accommodating learning styles, teacher-to-student ratios.*
- *Delivery - optional methods of delivery, ability to take courses anywhere, virtual schooling, home schooling, blended instruction.*
- *Recognition - focus on outcomes, testing and marking processes (for example, eliminate bell curves) and credit for prior learning.*
- *Technology - computer access, navigational skills, on-line program offerings, connectivity, bandwidth.*
- *Transitions - seamless accreditation, ability to move between institutions, opportunities for employment.*
- *Programming - learning opportunities relevant to career choices and the circumstances of those with special needs.*
- *Bureaucracy - degree of rigidity of admissions process, silos within government, collaboration between service providers and the incidence of being passed from one person or agency to another.*

Factors affecting the community's ability to take action include:

- *Level of decision making*
- *Funding for learning initiatives*
- *Meaningful partnerships*
- *Awareness (lack of)*
- *Overload*
- *The degree to which a community sees itself as a learning community.*
- *The community's position on a continuum of dependence, independence to inter-dependence.*
- *An understood common goal.*
- *Sharing applications of technology*
- *Leadership*
- *Information resources*
- *Cost of implementing and maintaining infrastructure.*
- *Sufficient community capacity*

Some participants also saw the media as an important influence in the lives of individuals or communities.

3 What can we do to maximize the positive influences and minimize the barriers?

Participants suggested a number of principles/recommendations aimed at improving the individual's ability to learn and the community's ability to take action. Many of the suggestions focused on empowering the individual through changing attitudes, equality of opportunity, provision of learner supports, enhanced choice, increased portability of learning. A number of small groups identified the need for funding and for government to view the need for increased spending in education as an investment and not as an expense. There were also a number of suggestions to challenge existing bureaucracies and emphasize partnerships at all points across the learning continuum - partnerships involving individuals, learning providers, community, business and government. Some of the specific points captured in the small group discussions include the following:

Lifelong Learning Develops Citizens

- *Promote and foster parental involvement in encouraging perpetual learning.*
- *Recognize that "it takes a village to raise a child."*
- *Promote and foster excellence in teaching and mentoring - enhance learning through mentorship programs, train teachers to individualize teaching and give them the resources to do it.*
- *Foster lifestyle education (learning in all stages of life) that allows individuals to take personal responsibility and hold themselves accountable. Minimize top direction.*
- *Maintain human interaction and recognize ALL people.*
- *Promote and foster learning opportunities for adults at large.*
- *Practice flexible learning methods for teams, groups or the individual.*
- *Create the right atmosphere for learning that supports physical, mental and spiritual needs.*
- *Ensure students get a good start in early years, starting at birth and continuing through every learning situation.*
- *Introduce more cross-cultural programs.*
- *Cultivate an attitude of looking outward and learning from other cultures.*
- *Provide sufficient language training.*
- *Develop an all-inclusive concept, enveloping academics, art, culture, physical development, mentoring and career development in a way that values students and students value, in turn.*
- *Communicate positive models of the kind of education we want.*

Equal Opportunities

- *Start with an absolute commitment to "educating children well, and valuing all children equally."*
- *Recognize that we need to provide extra resources to support the learning of higher-needs students.*
- *Support different learning styles and ways of achieving requirements, but also monitor achievement of results.*
- *Make all situations safe for learning.*
- *Recognize that "higher needs" has a range of forms, encompassing physical, emotional, economic and geographic needs.*
- *Emphasize the importance of human relationships in the community of learners.*
- *The earlier we intervene and support, the more likely we are to see success.*

Equal Access

- *Tuition should not be a factor in a potential student's access.*
- *Ensure that enough seats are available in post-secondary institutions.*
- *Make schools accessible to the entire community.*

- *Break down socio-economic boundaries by providing funding that ensures students have access to further education.*
- *Provide subsidized housing.*
- *Develop virtual delivery of programs (in the spirit of cradle to grave learning) for rural Albertans - and provide adequate support.*
- *Ensure that racial, gender or cultural factors do not limit access to programs.*
- *Accommodate all age groups.*

Personal Supports

- *Cultivate an orientation to learning - see education as affecting whole lives (learner, partner and family).*
- *Focus on the other roles by providing coaching, mentoring and support systems that provide a sense of purpose.*
- *Integrate support structures.*
- *Emphasize the need for family support especially in early childhood education.*
- *Allow all opportunities for learners, partners and family members to share personally about handling stress.*
- *Use all available community resources for learning, especially to encourage learning among seniors.*
- *Provide resources to accommodate and support a community learning environment by extending the teacher's role into the community.*
- *Teach stress reduction techniques in programs.*
- *Make support services available (personal and financial, counseling, alcohol and drug, medical). Redefine help as okay.*
- *Prepare teachers, employers, and managers to recognize stress-related problems.*

Greater Choice

- *Develop systems that support "just-in-time learning" - anything, anytime, anywhere.*
- *Increase freedom and choice - stop resisting what we are not familiar with.*
- *Allow consumer ratings of courses, allowing quality be more visible to the learner, who, in turn, can make choices in a streamlined fashion.*
- *Allow second chances.*
- *Inform all learners of all available choices.*
- *Redesign the funding of education to allow for greater individual choice by providing learners with learning credit cards that are linked to e-commerce or vouchers.*

More Seamless Delivery Options

- *Increase portability of credit across regional, national and international boundaries.*
- *Allow learners the opportunity to get credit through any number of means - for example, the Internet, classroom and other forms of distance delivery.*

- *Increase flexibility of information delivery.*
- *Seamless transferability for public and private institutions.*
- *Provide multiple learning options to ensure all students are motivated to learn.*
- *Maximize the roles and expertise of counselors and advisers. Facilitate a greater role for teachers by providing opportunities for information sharing on extranets.*
- *Increase transferability, allowing learners to choose courses from different institutions while working toward one final degree or diploma. The learner will demand this service, if empowered to do so.*
- *Involve all areas of life, including personal, spiritual and physical and take into account employment, family and health.*
- *Allow learning for credit and non-credit purposes.*

Recognition of Prior Learning

- *Allow similar training programs to exchange similar criteria.*
- *Recognize credentials, trade certification, certificates, diplomas and degrees.*
- *Recognize skills acquired in a non-traditional environment.*
- *Develop a system to credit vocational and technical training towards university degree programs.*
- *Learning outcomes need to be assessed to assure skill and knowledge competency.*
- *Foster clear communication between institutions.*

Funding

- *Recognize that educating all children well requires substantial resources.*
- *Structure public funding to reflect goals.*
- *Be prepared to pay the cost for remedial programs.*
- *Recognize that education is as much as an investment as an expenditure.*
- *Allow greater flexibility in student loans and availability of grants and loans.*
- *Make people more aware of incentives for learning (for example, Registered Education Saving Plan).*
- *Provide resources to maintain an excellent education system (for example, infrastructure, faculty renewal and retention, resources and research funds for faculty and student debt reduction).*
- *Develop a new paradigm for the definition of "student" (by rethinking how we provide funding support for learners).*
- *Invest in prevention and save in the long-run.*
- *Market collective offerings of education according to an "Alberta" brand name throughout the world - for example, Campus Alberta. Provide the financial resources to market education world wide on the Internet.*

Partnerships

- *Foster complete cooperation from all levels of government, provincial and community.*
- *Develop effective collaboration between education and health systems.*
- *Increase community based ability to make decisions.*
- *Foster meaningful partnerships among the lifelong community of learners.*
- *Increase industry support.*
- *Increase flexibility among systems to allow access and provide resources.*
- *Develop policies that reward collaboration.*
- *Create more meaningful student internships.*
- *Develop a strong partnership with agencies that provide part time work for students.*
- *Reduce cost through business community partnerships or leasing, bulk purchasing of hard, software and infrastructure to enable information highway.*

Challenge Bureaucracy

- *De-institutionalize/de-industrialize education.*
- *Break the monopoly of established bureaucracies that tend to resist change negatively affecting them and stifle choice.*
- *Allow professional licensing bodies and new corporate boards to establish credentials (e.g. Microsoft).*
- *Decrease government control and micro-management.*
- *Rethink allocation of resources.*
- *Personalize and individualize learning by reducing class size.*
- *Increase flexibility in curriculum and delivery - currently, we have a top down system.*

Technology

- *Stop thinking technology can be the solution or replacement for anything.*
- *Change attitudes, focusing instead on technology as a tool that enables use and integration when appropriate.*
- *Don't give technology to those who are not prepared to use it - attitude change and training may be required.*
- *Use technology to enhance distance learning and accessibility of resources.*
- *Ensure every student develops expert use of technology.*
- *Practice the effective use of technology.*
- *People needs should 'drive' technology, rather than allowing technology to 'drive' people.*

Keynote Speaker

At lunch on the second day of the Forum, the second keynote speaker, Norman Longworth - an international expert and practitioner in the field of lifelong learning, spoke to participants about the "what, why and how" processes of developing a lifelong learning culture.
Dr. Longworth recently established a European Centre for the Learning City at Sheffield Hallam University in England and has recently published his second book entitled Learning Cities for a Learning Century.

Norman Longworth spoke of the imperative concerning lifelong learning, not just for governments but for every organization in the future. He said it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the survival of nations, organizations and communities in an advanced technological world would depend on the development of lifelong learning skills and values as an essential part of their culture.

Lifelong learning was defined as the development of human potential through a continuously supported process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity, and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments.

Mr. Longworth described some of the common fundamentals and perceptions around lifelong learning despite differences in interpretation that are often based on differences in culture and tradition:

- The use of new technologies for learning and, in particular, the power of distance and open learning tools and techniques to give access to information, courses and seminars on a global scale.

- The fundamental application of human rights and, above all the recognition of the right of each individual to develop his or her own human potential

- The development of globalized information societies where the distinction between work, leisure and life is increasingly blurred and old concepts of nationalism and ethnic and religious boundaries are breaking down.

Norman Longworth gave the Government of Alberta high marks in recognizing the importance of fostering a lifelong learning culture. Alberta, he said, should be commended for appointing a Minister of Learning (as opposed to a Minister of Education) and for formally recognizing through it's three year business plan that education is a seamless process from cradle to grave.

Mr. Longworth described 7 challenges to implementing a vision for lifelong learning in the province:

- Transforming Perceptions
- Auditing Learning Needs
- Broadcasting the message
- Locating the resources
- Reforming the curriculum
- Empowering the Learner
- Activating the Community

Norman Longworth encouraged participants to develop communities of learning - communities in which business and industry, schools, colleges, universities, professional organizations and local government co-operates closely to better the quality of life for all and where:

- no one is excluded from learning;
- all resources (human and physical) are used;
- it looks outward to the rest of the world;
- modern communications technology is used to link people internally and externally;
- citizens are encouraged to develop personal learning plans and use guides and mentors to develop their knowledge and skills; and
- learning is celebrated frequently and encourages whole families to participate.

Finally, Mr. Longworth left participants with a set of core competencies for the lifelong learning age:

- Learning to learn
- Applying new knowledge into practice
- Questioning and reasoning
- Managing oneself and others
- Managing information
- Communication skills
- Team work
- Problem solving skills
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Practicing lifelong learning - continuously upgrading personal skills and competence.

TOPIC 3:

Fostering a Lifelong Learning Culture

Promoting a lifelong learning culture in Alberta will be necessary to increase public awareness and understanding of the importance of lifelong learning to Alberta's social, economic and cultural environment. One of the key messages in promoting lifelong learning is the importance of investing in people. As we move into the next century, investment in people and their knowledge and skills acquisition will be one of the most significant determinants of income, quality of life and provincial economic prosperity. Learners, parents, learning providers, government, industry and community stakeholders all have roles to play in promoting a lifelong learning culture.

In this session, participants identified key players, their roles in creating and promoting a lifelong learning culture and opportunities for partnerships.

1 Who are the key players in creating a lifelong learning culture and what should their roles be?

Learners

Participants stated that learners must take ownership for their learning - setting goals for themselves, determining and making their learning needs known, and being accountable. Participants suggested the following characteristics would lead to successful learning outcomes: positive attitude, an inherent desire to learn, commitment, listening skills, flexibility and openness, imagination, creativity and critical thinking. Participants also felt that learners had a responsibility to transfer their knowledge to others and to be a role model and mentor to those around them.

Parents

Participants suggested that parents had perhaps the most important role in fostering a lifelong learning culture - creating a strong foundation by meeting basic needs and in creating a positive learning environment within the home. It was also suggested that parents had an important mentoring role by actively participating in learning activities (e.g. reading) with their children, by providing knowledge, and by instilling within them a desire to learn. A final area of responsibility of parents identified by participants was one of advocacy - an informed, active advocacy of the learning needs of their children to schools, government and elected officials.

Learning Providers

As with parents, participants stated that one of the principle roles of learning providers is to instill a passion for learning. Teachers were described by participants as a source of knowledge, inspiration and encouragement, guidance and leadership. Schools and institutions have important roles in providing flexible, relevant, quality programming that is more responsive to learner needs and reflective of global trends. Participants suggested that learning providers would play a key future role in fostering a culture of lifelong learning through greater collaboration and partnering with each other, with parents, community and with business and government. Finally, participants suggested that learning providers had a responsibility to work with government to review and adapt curriculum, to provide better access both in terms of time and place and meeting the needs of those with disabilities, and to provide credentials that are portable and linked across the learning system.

Government

Participants identified the primary roles of Alberta Learning to be system funding, leadership, listening and consultation, coordination, policy development, regulation and standard setting to ensure quality, monitoring, curriculum development, accreditation and accountability to Albertans for results. A number of participants stated that the department should engage institutions as equal partners and refrain from micro-managing the system. Alberta Learning, some participants suggested, has a responsibility to level the playing field not only for learners with barriers to access, but also for learning providers outside the existing publicly funded system. Participants also suggested that the department has a role in staying attuned to inter-provincial, national and international developments, agreements and best practices.

Alberta Learning, participants suggested, has an important advocacy role to play in marketing the importance of developing a lifelong learning culture to Albertans. Alberta Learning also has a role to encourage and foster lifelong learning across government by "walking the talk" and facilitating and coordinating the process. The department also needs to provide incentive for

change and support activities identified as important to achieving a vision for lifelong learning - for example, prior learning assessment and a broadening of apprenticeship programming.

Business and Industry

Participants suggested that business and industry needs to play a more active role in creating a learning organization by upgrading the skill level of employees and allowing flexible work schedules to accommodate the learning needs of staff. Participants suggested that business and industry should foster lifelong learning through active and meaningful partnerships with learning providers, not the type of partnerships that provide funding in exchange for advertising products. The types of partnerships suggested were those that involve a job shadowing, sharing of resources, field trips, mentoring and other ways to enrich the learning not only for students, but for teachers and employees as well.

Participants also suggested that business and industry have a funding role (particularly in the area of adult learning). Providing paid work experience and internship opportunities; funding for research and development; and funding for learning technologies were cited as potential areas of involvement.

Participants also stated that business and industry have an important role in clearly identifying skill requirements and working with government and learning providers to formally recognize learning acquired through non-traditional means.

Community

Participants suggested that community and a sense of community are critical to fostering a lifelong learning culture. Participants suggested that organizations come together to create a community of learners and that this could be done through shared facilities and resources (for example, seniors sharing life stories and reading to children in seniors centers). Community, participants suggested, has a multiplicity of roles including public awareness, volunteerism, in-kind support, advocacy, leadership, mentorship, and other personal supports. Participants also suggested that community organizations within a geographic or advocacy area work together to identify the learning needs of constituents and to monitor and provide advice to government on policies that affect them.

2 What are the opportunities for partnership?

Participants noted that many positive partnership activities were already occurring and provided examples that were large and small in scope, reflecting the wide range of possibilities that come with involving various learning stakeholders. One example noted the partnership between DeVry Institute and an elementary school in an inner city neighborhood. DeVry provided funding for computers and students to volunteer at the school. Participants suggested a need to communicate examples of successful partnerships more broadly. Participants also talked about the need to work together to find out what others are doing, identify unused capacity (for example, empty spaces in schools off-hours) and identify gaps.

Participants suggested partnership opportunities could be pursued between:

- *Business and learning providers to facilitate time off with pay for employees to learn.*
- *Institutions and business to provide exchange programs.*
- *Post secondary, basic education, business and government to collaborate in the area of information and communication technologies.*
- *Student unions and youth groups*
- *Professional organizations collaborate together to facilitate learning - for example, professional accountants could work in school labs to train people in the community.*
- *Child and youth care providers and learning providers to establish accredited child youth care centers on campuses.*
- *Business and institutions to deliver courses that meet business needs.*
- *Advanced learners and elementary learners - for example, senior art students in elementary classes could enable other students to visit art centers and cultural events.*
- *Grandparents and children as resources to students (reading and tutorials).*
- *Business and elementary schools, allowing elementary students to visit work-sites.*
- *Businesses and schools to facilitate presentations and visits to the classroom.*
- *Unions, business and government to make labor standards more supportive of learning.*
- *Private and public learning providers to arrive at better agreements and cooperation.*
- *Basic education and post-secondary education for enabling smoother transitions.*
- *Educational institutions and municipalities to improve, for example, libraries and recreational facilities and deal with taxes and permit issues.*

- *Educational institutions and business to improve technological access to learning resources and options.*
- *Schools and community leagues to improve programs, resources and facilities.*
- *Community input into what teachers are teaching*
- *Schools and families.*
- *Schools and service clubs.*
- *Schools and communities of practice/professional organizations*
- *School counselors (who can be too isolated in their offices) with community and with students.*
- *Schools and social service agencies.*
- *Politicians (all levels) and school boards.*
- *Politicians and learners.*
- *Schools, universities, unions and professional organizations.*
- *Service clubs, professional organizations, business community and education community.*

While affirming the use of partnerships and the need for them, participants noted competition for resources was a reality and that a barrier to potential partnerships was the resulting protection of turf. Participants stated that future incentive or reward systems should be based upon collaboration, not competition. Other identified barriers to effective partnering include educator burnout and lack of available time needed to build understanding leading to effective partnerships. Partnerships, participants said, are often short-term, hard to sustain, and require a lot of effort.

Participants suggested that an increased emphasis should be placed on the home, community and workplace as key places of learning. Participants said that all stakeholders should give thought as to how they could be a partner in lifelong learning, whether as funders or providers, public authorities, employers, trade unions, voluntary organizations or individuals.

Contact Information

If you wish to provide information to the department or add your name to a departmental mailing list, please refer to the contact information below.

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